



# Housing Works Dispensary Opens New York's First Legal Recreational Marijuana Dispensary



📅 November 15, 2023 📁 Dispensaries, Health 👤 CBD Honcho

On Thursday, [Housing Works Dispensary](#) opened up their former Gap storefront as the state's inaugural legal recreational cannabis dispensary. Housing Works is well known for operating thrift stores and offering support services for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Retail marijuana licensee and selling six brands. Consumer trends indicate customers preferring sativa strains.

## What to Expect

Housing Works, a Manhattan nonprofit supporting those living with HIV and AIDS, officially kicked off New York's transition from decades of criminalizing cannabis to an industry forecast to generate \$4 billion over five years. An innovative law passed in March 2021 gives priority to those affected by enforcement laws to gain early business opportunities within this new industry.

The day was filled with symbolism: government officials and celebrities joined customers waiting in line at Broadway and East 8th Street for their first purchases, with seemingly thousands lining up outside to make purchases; a DJ provided lively music while waiting shoppers entered through its doors.



Housing Works' CEO Charles King noted in November, when one of eight organizations received Conditional Adult-Use Retail Dispensary licenses, that his organization has long advocated for legalization and sought solutions to repair harm done by decades of drug war policies that have disproportionately targeted communities of color. As per King, this store will operate under an affirmative action policy while training community leaders within cannabis.

"Every state that's done this paid lip service to equity, but once their program launched it became big-box business. Our organization aims to avoid this fate; their primary mission is providing safe access to medical marijuana while reinvested profits into communities they serve."

## Getting Start

New York's inaugural legal marijuana shop officially opened for business Thursday, signaling an unprecedented transformation after decades of criminalizing cannabis use and an explosion of underground smoke shops. [Housing Works Cannabis Co](#), run by Housing Works nonprofit and located inside an iconic Soho bookstore chain, symbolizes New York State's commitment to repair harm caused by criminal enforcement practices.

The 4,400-square-foot dispensary currently accepts cash-only transactions; officials plan to add that capability by February's end. Staff

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strive to create a welcoming space focused on customer education and support; Housing Works CEO Charles King says the organization's experience advocating for housing, health care and social services for people living with HIV and AIDS will aid its leadership of this new industry.

He notes the nonprofit is working with local farmers to produce products that will create jobs in the city, while also serving as a community resource. Budtenders trained to answer any queries regarding use and safety will be available at its storefront location. Housing Works runs multiple thrift shops as social enterprises to reduce its reliance on grants and donations; its first week of sales should provide the organization with an early indication of demand, with flowers anticipated as being particularly popular compared with vapes, edibles and CBD offerings.

## Flower

Housing Works' dispensary marks an exciting new chapter of their social enterprise and business model. Established to address both HIV/AIDS and homelessness crises simultaneously in 1990, Housing Works operates thrift stores, SoHo bookstore cafe, and this cannabis shop as self-sustaining businesses to reduce dependence on grants and donations for operating funds. They also offer health care, job training, reentry services, advocacy advocacy harm reduction including syringe exchange programs.

On Thursday at 4:20 p.m., RSVPs surpassed 2,000 in anticipation of public sales; customers' lines extended well past St. Mark's Place. The store offers 100 items from seven brands for purchase at launch time; they hope to add even more options over time.

Arriving guests can choose from smokable flower, pre-rolled joints, tinctures and edibles ranging in price from \$2 for gummies up to \$36 for quarter ounce of flower. In addition, several social equity brands are carry in-store as well as products own by minority, women or LGBTQ-owned businesses.



Retail marijuana sales will support Housing Works' mission of combatting decades of unjust, drug-related incarcerations in communities disproportionately represented by black and Latinx people, such as affordable housing, healthcare services, job training programs, reentry support services and other essential support programs for people released from incarceration. All proceeds will also fund services such as affordable housing, healthcare provision and job reentry support for the transitioning to community living after release from prison.

## Edibles

New York's inaugural legal recreational weed shop officially opened for business Thursday, kicking off what many hope will become an expansion of cannabis stores across one of America's most lucrative markets. Housing Works, a nonprofit best known for selling secondhand designer clothing and activism-inspired merchandise thrift shops, began selling recreational marijuana at 4:20 pm – in reference to cannabis culture slang – with a line of adults aged 21 or over stretching around the block as soon as doors opened for sales.

Retail manager Sasha Nutgent oversaw this historic opening and noted that their operations had test extensively before opening their store – previously home to Gap. Nutgent reported sales have been strong since their doors first opened.

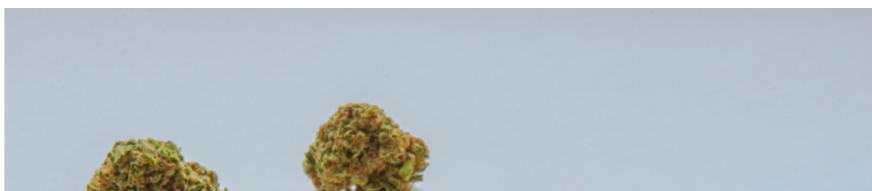
Housing Works' team of trend analysts have observed that customers are choosing flower based on potency and strain selections to aid with anxiety, sleep issues and pain relief. Their dispensary also offers products from social equity brands owned and run by Black, female or LGBTQ-led entities like Brelxi, Fat Nell or The Weekenders – these brands include products like Brelxi Fat Nell or Weekenders.

Florist Farms THC Gummies come in packages of 1/8 and 14g (before taxes), offering flavors such as sour watermelons, green apples, peaches, strawberries, bedtime blueberry and more. Aryloom-infused gummies and chocolate bars are also offered; currently the store operates solely using cash payment; Charles King, Housing Works CEO and founder, hopes that debit card processing services could become available by the end of 2023.

## Pre-Rolled Joints

Pre-rolls provide an easy way for newer smokers to enjoy cannabis without needing to master rolling technique. Constructed using marijuana from one strain in paper cones and processed through a machine to remove air pockets so each joint smokes smoothly and evenly, pre-rolls also make an excellent way for consumers wanting to experiment with various cannabis strains and discover which are their personal favorites.

The Housing Works Dispensary offers multiple strains of smokable flower and will soon offer other products such as tinctures, edibles and concentrates. Open seven days a week, it accepts cash only transactions.





Housing Works has long fought for social justice, and co-founder Charles King told reporters that the nonprofit sought a license to sell marijuana to accommodate those who have been criminalized due to marijuana usage.

Housing Works dispensary proceeds will benefit their existing work, such as HIV/AIDS housing and employment programs, sexual health services and legal advocacy work. They operate several thrift stores, bookstore cafes and community organizations that offer job opportunities, legal advocacy support and comprehensive housing and health services to low income and homeless individuals across New York City. Housing Works promotes an environment of compassion while dispelling stigmas while participating in "pleasure activism", such as celebrating Pride or marching in the NYC Dyke March. As proud CAURD licensees they will give employment preference to people incarcerated for possession charges.

## Accessories

New York's inaugural legal cannabis shop officially opened for business on Thursday, December 29. A line of hundreds was seen outside Housing Works in Lower Manhattan which operates as part of a nonprofit dedicated to fighting poverty and homelessness.

All proceeds of the store will be given back to its parent organization, Housing Works, which also operates an upscale thrift shop chain and bookstore cafe as social enterprises in order to fund services like job training and legal advocacy, health care support services such as syringe exchange services. As well as harm reduction programs such as mental health counseling and adult day healthcare.

This shop will not only carry an array of cannabis brands but will also sell accessories ranging from pipes and humidors to vaporizers and grinders. One notable accessory from clothing entrepreneur Armen Gregorian's MAE line, designed to bring "an elevated take on cannabis."

MAE will expand their selection of accessories as it gains more insight into what customers are seeking from its store, while shoppers can also pick up apparel and accessories from other local cannabis brands, including t-shirts designed by Brooklyn fashion designer Joe Doucet that read "Make Love Not Drugs War." MAE also has several sleek, discreet vaporizers specifically tailored to be odorless for customers to try.



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